



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

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Testimony of Cathleen Anderson-Baker

My name is Cathleen Anderson-Baker. I am Coordinator of Keep the Promise Coalition. Keep the Promise Coalition was founded in 1999 when several consumers, family members, providers and advocates convened to discuss the mental health crisis in Connecticut. In the three years following the closure of two large state hospitals, the demand for mental health services continued to rise. Connecticut was unable to meet the needs of the clients and families it was supposed to serve. Roughly 90% of Connecticut's children were in expensive residential settings or institutions rather than in the Community.

In 2002 the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on mental health systems gave recommendations to require ongoing funding to children and adult mental health systems to repair the damage.

The Keep the Promise Coalition is dedicated to continue advocating for the "Blue Ribbon Solutions" needed to maintain and expand critical mental health services for adults and children. I am here to talk about Senate Bill No. 1 – Affordable Quality Health Care.

In Connecticut, during a single year, there are an estimated 600,000 adults with mental illness (including 135,000 with serious mental illness) and 85,000 children with serious emotional disturbance. In 1990 the indirect cost of psychiatric disabilities-financial losses resulting from reduced productivity, incarceration, or premature death- were estimated to be \$79 billion.

Absence of appropriate community services has caused gridlock in hospital beds making it difficult to discharge those who are ready to go and admit people in need of acute inpatient psychiatric care.

There is an increase of folks with psychiatric disabilities who are in jail, most without treatment and many without medication.

Nursing homes have become an alternative – due to lack of treatment and housing.

As a consumer fortunate to have insurance, despite a psychiatric diagnosis, I have been able to receive what I need to stay well, work and raise my daughter – basically to live a life everyone should be entitled to.

I am here today to ask you to please recognize the dire need to include the treatment of mental illness and substance abuse.

I would be willing to bet that every person in this room has in their family or cares about someone who struggles with depression, anxiety, addiction or more serious illnesses such as schizophrenia or bi-polar illness. There may be some folks in this room, like myself, who know about it first hand.

The bottom line is – mental health mandates must stay in place when providing folks with health insurance.

To support recovery, consumers need access to the full range of services needed to maintain good mental health. Everyone knows without treatment expenses skyrocket. Folks are forced to go to emergency rooms. People are institutionalized because of the lack of a means to pay for care.

Mental illness does not discriminate. It does not matter if you are rich or poor. It does matter if you cannot afford to pay for help.

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse headed by Commissioner Thomas Kirk recognizes the need for maintaining services necessary for recovery. In fact, Connecticut has received a federal transformation grant to increase awareness and access to mental health services for all citizens.

I urge you to pass Bill No. 1, Affordable Quality Health Care, and to insure that affordable, accessible and ongoing services for folks who suffer from mental illness is mandatory in all of the plans that are offered to folks in the form of Health Insurance.

Thank you.